

India to launch \$45 tablet computer

October 4 2011, by Pratap Chakravarty



Indian customers visit the computer section at the Croma electronics mega-store in Mumbai in September 2011. India is set Wednesday to launch its long-awaited low-cost computer, a \$45 tablet device designed to bring the information technology revolution to tens of millions of students.

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The touchscreen computer has a seven-inch (18-centimetre) screen, Wi-Fi Internet access, a media player and 180 minutes of [battery power](#), according to official specifications.

Update: [India launches 'world's cheapest' tablet computer](#)

Called the "Akash" ("Sky"), the locally-made device will be launched in

New Delhi by Human Resources Development Minister Kapil Sibal after years of delays.

"It will cost 2,200 rupees (\$45) and the first batch of 500 tablets will be handed over to students after the release," ministry spokeswoman Mamata Varma told AFP.

"Initially, 700 Akash tablets will be made every day and we expect the production to pick up when more companies join in to manufacture the device," she said.

The commercial marketing strategy for the Akash remains unclear, but most of the computers are likely to be sold through universities and colleges rather than shops.

Canada-based Datawind, the current manufacturer, said the tablet used an Android 2.2 operating system, had video-conferencing capability, two USB ports and a 32GB expandable memory.

But experts warned its 256-megabyte [random access memory](#) (RAM) would limit performance.

Commercial manufacturers are hoping Indian customers will leapfrog personal computers to buy tablets, as millions did by buying [mobile telephones](#) instead of waiting for a landline.

Apple's internationally-popular iPad computers costs a minimum of \$600 in [India](#), with competitor Reliance Communications selling a rival tablet device at about \$290.

The Akash is part of a push to increase the number of students in higher education and to give them the technological skills needed to further boost the country's recent [rapid economic growth](#).

India, where the 61 percent literacy rate lags far behind many other developing nations such as China with 92 percent, is making major efforts to improve its education system.

The government had promised to release the first 100,000 Akash computers by January 2011, but uncertainty over the level of government subsidy is thought to have delayed mass production.

The much-hyped "computer for the masses" was said to be on the brink of release in both 2005 and 2009 -- only for it never to materialise.

Industry observers say rising labour charges, cheap imports, and more sophisticated tablets could undermine the Akash among India's tech-savvy youngsters.

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